

David Scott, the groundbreaker next door

David Scott, PhD, vice chair for research at USU, has been shaping science in the world's best laboratories for decades now. His work – immune tolerance research – has led to many breakthroughs, especially for autoimmune diseases, conditions where the body destroys normal tissue because it can't distinguish between helpful and harmful cells.

Scott is continuing this important work at USU, and he's crossing boundaries too. The New Jersey native, an immunologist by training, is collaborating with the nation's leading gene therapists. Together, they're finding ways to "reeducate" the immune system, so helpful proteins aren't damaged by the body's natural defenses.

"Understanding how the body turns responses on and off is helpful for many different reasons, including the potential for researchers to develop life-saving vaccines for autoimmune diseases, which affect millions of people around the world each year," he said.

Scott is growing other groundbreaking research at USU too. He teaches effective grant-writing skills – an important, but daunting part of the research process. Scott also mentors faculty members at the university and encourages multidisciplinary partnerships, both on campus and at nearby research laboratories.

"I've really enjoyed being part of USU's faculty, they're truly an incredible group," he said. "Developing new methods for expanding the university's already strong research programs is exciting too. Good investigators make great instructors, and military medicine needs both."

For Scott, his 2010 faculty appointment at USU was both a homecoming and a calling. The Bethesda doctor used to travel more than 40 miles every day to his job at the University of Maryland, where he worked as the associate director of the Center for Vascular & Inflammatory Diseases.

"Working in Baltimore was great, but I wanted to be closer to my home, and I really respected the powerful mission at USU," he said. "I felt like I was part of something honorable and much bigger than my research alone when I came here."

An important part of the university thread now, Scott bicycles to work most mornings, another one of his passions. The 15-minute ride gives Scott enough time to clear his head before another busy day of groundbreaking science begins.